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**Characters:**Narrator; John Sutter; James Marshall; James H. Carson; President James Polk; Melvin Paden, a miner; Sallie Hester, an overlander; Levi Strauss; Californian #1; Forty-niner #1; Forty-niner #2; Marshall’s crew; Californians; Forty-niners; Native Americans; Miners; Merchants

**Narrator:** In 1848, California wasn’t a state and it had only been a U.S. territory for a few years. The United States took it over after the Mexican-American war in 1846. It was a land of ranchers and farmers, with very few settlers. But one day, on John Sutter’s land, something happened that would change California forever.

**Marshall:** My name is James Marshall, and I worked for John Sutter. My crew and I were working along the American River, getting ready to build a new sawmill, when I noticed something shiny in the mud. I picked it up, and saw it was some kind of metal. I could pound it flat with a hammer, but it didn’t break apart. I was sure it was gold!

**Marshall’s crew:** No, that’s not gold! Mr. Marshall, this is just another one of your crazy ideas.

**Marshall:** I tested it with acid; I boiled it. It doesn’t melt, and it stays shiny. This has got to be gold!

**Marshall’s crew:** Maybe you’re right. Maybe it is gold!

**Marshall:** The next morning I found some more. I thought maybe I shouldn’t have told all the men about it, and kept the news and the gold myself. I told my boss, Mr. Sutter.

**Marshall’s crew:** Gold! We found gold! There’s gold just laying in the river. We’ll be rich! Gold!

**Sutter:** Marshall, you and your men just keep quiet about this. We’ll have a gold rush on our hands if this news gets out.

**Sutter/Marshall/Marshall’s men (whispering):** Gold!

**Narrator:** But they couldn’t keep the news quiet. Soon it was in the newspapers. “Gold has been found in almost every part of the country.”

**Marshall’s men:** Gold!

**Forty-niners:** Gold! There’s gold in California!

**Californian #1:** I hear there’s gold as big as hen’s eggs. You can pick it up right off the ground. I’m going to be rich!

**James H. Carson:** I didn‘t believe it; those stories weren’t true. But then I saw with my own eyes a big sack of gold nuggets. I looked for a moment, then grew excited. I wanted to dance -- I began to think that all the houses around me were too small; I could build a castle if I wanted! I would have servants to do all my work. The ladies would all love me. The richest people in the world would be poor next to me. I had gold fever!

**Californians:** We all had gold fever!

**Narrator:** California was thousands of miles from the rest of the United States. It took a year for word to reach the East.

**Forty-niners:** There’s gold in California!

**Narrator:** Even the President said so.

**President Polk:** We have authentic reports of gold in California.

**Forty-niners:** We’re going to California!

**Narrator:** Farmers left their fields; merchants closed their shops; soldiers left their posts.

**Forty-niners:** We’re going to California!

**Melvin Paden:** I told my wife “If I could find gold; we could buy property so we could have a place of our own, so I might not have to work so hard for other people any more. We’ll just be apart a year, and I’ll come back rich.”

**Narrator:** But getting to California wasn’t easy. The earliest immigrants came by ship around Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America. Some took the ships to Panama, and crossed the Isthmus there, taking another ship to California. This was the quickest way, but there was a great risk of catching dangerous diseases. Sailing around Cape Horn took five to eight months, depending on the weather. There were violent storms around the Cape, and sometimes ships sank.

**Forty-niners:** This ships were crowded and uncomfortable. We got seasick, and the food had bugs in it. And we were bored, with nothing to do, for this long trip, except think about the gold we’d find in California.

**Narrator:** Americans who lived in the central states usually took the journey overland. This route was shorter than the sea voyage, but it wasn’t much faster, and could take as much as six months, and most immigrants were unprepared for the hardships they would face. Still they were full of optimism and dreams of gold.

**Forty-niner#1:** At Fort Laramie I sent a letter home saying “Everyone is talking of the gold they will find. Just imagine yourself seeing me come back home to Massachusetts with $10,000 or even $100,000”

**Forty-niners:** We were scared of the Indians, and they were scared of us, but sometimes they helped us.

**Narrator:** However, the real danger of the overland journey was lack of water, especially during the last few hundred miles. Sometimes water could sell for as much as $100 a drink. Those who couldn’t afford water sometimes died of thirst.

**Forty-niners:** Food prices were high, too.

**Forty-niner #2:** Sugar was $1.50 per pint. But people brought too much bacon, and you could buy that for a penny a pound.

**Narrator:** The trail was crowded; sometimes there was no grass for the animals to eat because the stock of the earlier immigrants had eaten it all. And disease was common, just as it was on the ships.

**Sallie Hester:** The weary, weary tramp of men and beasts, worn out with heat and famished for water, will never be erased from my memory.

**Narrator:** But life wasn’t always easy for the forty-niners once they got to California. Most who came never found enough gold to make them rich. Gold mining was hard work. The forty-niners used to tell a story of a grocer who couldn’t wait to see the elephant at the circus. He brought his horse-cart with all his goods along with him to see the elephant, but when he finally found the circus, the elephant reared up and frightened his horses, upset the cart, and ruined all the stuff he had to sell, leaving him with nothing. He came back home and told his family “I saw the elephant.”

**Forty-niners:** We saw the elephant.

**Narrator:** This meant “We had a hard time.”

**Narrator:** Some of the most successful immigrants to California were the merchants who sold goods to the miners. It was easier to make money that way than it was by gold mining.

**Miners:** We mined for gold.

**Merchants:** And we mined the miners!

**Levi Strauss:** I was selling canvas to make tents for the miners, but one of them said he needed new pants. I noticed a lot of the miners were wearing old ragged pants, with holes in them. I thought I could make pants out of the canvas, which was stronger and would last. The miner who was my first customer paid six dollars for his new pants, and he spread the word about “Levi’s pants”. I wrote my brothers in New York asking them for more canvas, but they sent denim, which was a strong cotton material. Soon all the miners were wearing “Levi’s”, and other workers liked them too. Business was booming!

**Narrator:** Levi Strauss was one of many people who made fortunes, not from gold mining, but from taking advantage of the business opportunities presented by the gold rush.

**Narrator:** The California Gold Rush changed the West forever; it brought settlers westward in greater numbers, ensuring that it would become part of the United States. It established California as a land of many peoples, from many cultures. Even today, California is a place where new ideas and inventions flourish.

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